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ON FURNISHING BEAUTIFULLY.

BY MRS. M. E. HAWES.

THAT A HOUSE MAY BE BEAUTIFUL it must be interesting. That a house may be interesting it must have character. It can never have character until individual taste is left free; until people realize that in art-matters everyone must have what he likes best about him, and so much of it that his house becomes the index of his nature and his tastes.

It is often desirable to improve people's taste; but in any case their houses ought to reflect their character, and they are sure to be interesting if they do that.

The preponderance of dark colors, or of light colors, of soft harmonies or of odd contrasts, betrays the presiding spirit as much as the class of furniture. The mere recurrence of straight lines and rectangular shapes, or of undulations and smooth curves, tells something of the owner's temper and habits, and has the same interest for us as a fine family portrait—it does not tell the whole character, it does not show all sides of a man, but as much as it does show is his own.

WE MUST HAVE LIBERTY, but liberty is not license. Wise liberty, which can give good reason for choice or action, is founded upon intelligence and taste, which means the faculty of discriminating. We cannot throw away the experience of our forerunners, nor the rules that have grown out of that experience. We must use our precious liberty with discretion and kindness. The field of art resembles every other field of life and effort. Every child loves its freedom; but the child—nay, the man too—is the happier for feeling nigh him the shelter of a home, the support of a guide that he may use or dispense with as he will. The child calls his guide "Father." The man calls his, "Public Opinion."

IN ART, THE PAST IS OUR GUIDE. The ideas, and experiments and successes of the ancient masters who gave us our whole theory and facility in art, surround us on all sides, whilst about them and us lies the Higher School, Eternal Nature, that taught them all they knew, and can teach us. The glorious Past, like a father, stands close behind us, ready to give us a hint at any moment, but like a father, the Past may be at once a blessing and a curse. A blessing in so far as it assists and heartens us, a curse when it binds our hands, numbs our new faculties, and forbids us to run alone.

When the simple, honest structure and the dainty, skilful, loving ornament, of some ancient chair, or chest, or weapon, or wall, delights us, showing what structure ought to be and what ornament means, our actual power to appreciate sometimes chokes the creative impulse in us, disheartens the best workman. The great master harms us, as a big tree overshadows and kills the grass blades beneath the branches. Fancy, skill, patience and a sense of grace and propriety can go no further than in many ancient works of art—humble, domestic work, too. Why? Because the workers took such pains with them.

But the needs of every age differ, and the power to create need never die; it only asks to be recognised and nursed. We ought to be able to use the hints of the Past without relaxing our efforts in the Present.

AND THOSE WHO LOVE BEAUTY, AND who want all their surroundings to be graceful and suggestive—not to have all the art-interest in the house framed in a few gilt parallelograms hung by strings and everything else an eyesore—would do well to encourage in every way the art productions turned out by the shops.

If you DESIRE REFORM quit the picture-galleries—go to the shops, and make the shops provide you with art in every article. Reform always works upward, and reform leans upon money. What is good, buy; what is poor, faulty and ugly, reject, and *give your reason*.

WE MUST OWN THE DANGERS WHICH BESET MODERN ART: (1), Misapplication of principles, because too many people want goods, and don't always want to pay for them or to wait for them. Hence the over-hurried workman forgets a *raison*

d'être here, misunderstands and caricatures his model there, and begins scamping his easiest task. (2), Stagnation, because no pressure is put upon the producer, owing to the lamentable ignorance in buyers of what constitutes good and bad work, and his want of discrimination between them when both are put before him, e. g. *Bad Taste*.

BUT WERE THE IMPORTANCE OF LIBERTY IN CHOICE better understood, a far larger variety of designs would soon supply the demand, and the public would soon become better judges. We should not have firms turning out a meagre list of chairs and tables, so marked and similar that to see one in a strange house is to know the price. We shall not have sellers forcing something on the helpless public because, "it is the last thing out" or "the first thing in," or what not. We shall not have all our houses alike, or be tied in one or more liveries of "fashion."

If people knew better what they wanted, and why they wanted it, AND THEIR OWN RIGHT TO IT, we should have better designs, better construction, better materials, than we do. The taste of buyer and seller act and re-act. The great and wealthy firms, which supply all our domestic art, will provide whatever the public insist on; will pay Royal Academicians, if necessary, to design stools and fire-irons, and we may again have Cellin's silver flagons and fire-dogs, Matsy's hammered iron chandeliers, Vischer's and Gibbon's carvings, and Holbein's jewelry, exquisitely reproduced, and about us at every step, and for the fraction of the cost which our forefathers paid for the original objects.

But with such aims, and they are good aims, we must not be afraid of new experiments, nor afraid of our opinion. Nor must we be afraid nor

sound with silence, if we want to get real pleasantness. Too much flat color demands the broken surface of figuring; and similarly a surface of broken color, even when good, often demands spaces of flat color as a relief to the brain.

Why do people cut their walls into slices, with a figured dado, a figured wall above, a figured frieze, all these divided by figured borderings, and overhung by pictures and ornaments full of detail, perhaps above the cornice, itself figured by its raised stucco work, a figured ceiling—till the eye faints for rest? In such a room we should avoid, if possible, even a figured gown, certainly a figured sofa or chair seat.

The opposite vice is seen when people cover wall, ceiling, floor, alike with plain tints, or materials that tell plain, as though a figured surface were a sin. The blankness then seems to grow upon the brain as a sort of craze; these folks seldom admit many ornaments to garnish the vacant spaces. They don't take kindly to pictures, save, perhaps, a Harmony in One Tint, by Mr. Whistler—frame and picture all the same color, requiring much imagination to decipher its meanings.

LET US GUARD AGAINST both *Monotony* and *Repletion*.

People's ideas are always rather apt to run away with them, when they have any at all. The darkness-lover, the brightness-lover, the Queen-Annite, the learned and epicurean artist of Louis XIV. himself—they all go too far upon their particular hobby.

This leads to a sort of EYE-GLUTTONY, AN ARTISTIC DISEASE resulting from over-indulging the faculty we call *taste* till it loses its delicacy, crowds too many flowers upon each other, and naturally misses every definite impression.

We all know houses full of beautiful collections, in which this immoderate crowding of good elements almost disgusts. This is the vice which the genius of the Sixteenth Century fell into in all departments of art, which made the elaborate and learned luxuriance of the Louis XIV. fashions sink into the overlaid confusion of those of Louis XV. Rich fancy may overgrow itself, become florid and immoderate, and, visually speaking, eat and drink itself to death.

Nothing is displeasing, except *too much of it*. Pain itself may be hailed in certain moods of over-sunny weariness, as an excitement—a relief—a landmark. Do we not pinch ourselves to feel ourselves alive?

It is exactly in this way that a disagreeable object can sometimes be introduced

in a beautiful room with a piquancy so delicate as to be mistakeable for pleasure.

THE CHARM OF QUAINNESS and *Bizarrerie* rests upon a similar need—that of *Reaction*. It is a taste which we generally outgrow, or learn to use with discretion, one not to be wholly discouraged, but subjected; well managed, it is the tonic of the eye—the *gustos* before a feast. All DEPENDS UPON HOW IT IS USED.

But when overdone it is commonly a sign of youth and immaturity. A passion for quaintness is really the love of the forbidden—a desire to get outside rules and grooves. It is, to some extent, a healthy instinct, like that which carries the schoolboy over a gate marked *No Thoroughfare*—just *because* it is so marked.

But it is one to be discreetly guided and harmonised with a due appreciation of those same rules and grooves. Grooves are our destruction. They are the ruts of worn-out roads. We *must* resist them at times, and we ought to; but perfectly good taste, whilst avoiding a painful clash with existing habits, knows how to be independent of them. Good taste knows where to introduce variety and change, where to shrewdly pop the odd or ugly object that really contributes to the beauty—but never allows quaintness to overpower the eye or grow into affectation.

Why not attach guards to the backs of all sofas and large pieces of furniture so as to protect the walls? The dealer who does this simple and inexpensive thing, without asking his customer to pay a few cents extra for it, will make a "hit"—until his neighbours follow his example.



HEADBOARD OF THE BED BELONGING TO MARIE ANTOINETTE.

From LE REVUE DES ARTS DECORATIFS.

ashamed to copy minutely what has already been found good.

THERE ARE COPIES AND COPIES. There is the careless parody, got up cheap to seem what it is not, such as the heavy-looking carved Stuart chair, whose tall back is so ill balanced by its weak forelegs, that on rising from it suddenly it falls backwards—which I have actually seen! And there is the patiently-wrought, intelligently studied and *avowed* copy (every copy ought to be avowed), which is always worth seeing, and worth possessing.

There is always a market for good copies. Many people would prefer to buy the fac-simile of some fine and celebrated spoon, chair, or drapery that has carried its historical associations through the admiration of centuries, than a new design, however good, without such associations.

It is the badness, the unintelligence of common copies that has rendered the word "copy" dishonorable. A copy is not a caricature.

In designing anew, as well as in understanding old designs, NATURE IS OUR BEST TEACHER. The natural shadow or light teaches us better than a book. If we look at a fine standard design long enough, we shall discover why this detail is put here or cannot be dispensed with there, just as the whole beauty of a poetic verse rests with every word. And if we go into the woods and gardens, living Nature is full of hints both for broad effects and tiny patterns.

Above all, Nature teaches us the value of moderation and due balance, and especially THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE OVERDONE or driven too far. We must correct sobriety with glitter as silence with sound; we must relieve glitter with color, as